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Getting 3D Content into the Home

By [Debra Kaufman](#)

January 11, 2010 – 10:15 pm

How will 3D get into the home? “3D Distribution — Delivering 3D to the Home and Beyond” was a topic of conversation at an interesting panel held at CES 2010, at an all-day symposium put together by [ETC](#), [USC's Entertainment Technology Center](#).

Moderated by Wendy Aylsworth, senior VP at [Warner Bros](#), the panel consisted of Walt Husak, senior manager of electronic media at [Dolby](#); Benn Carr, VP of new technology at [The Walt Disney Company](#); Chuck Pagano, CTO at [ESPN](#); David Broberg, VP of consumer video technology at [CableLabs](#); Brian Lenz, director of product design and TV product development at [BSkyB](#); and Mark Ely executive VP of strategy at [Sonic Solutions](#).

Husak started off the session with an overview of 3D to the home. “3D is a big success in the movie theaters so it's a natural migration to the home,” he said. He noted that 3D enters the home as optical media, via cable, satellite, terrestrial broadcast and game platforms. He went over the two potential delivery methods: frame compatible (side-by-side, over/under, line interleaved and checkerboard) and 2D compatible. “Frame compatible looks like a 2D signal to the network,” he explained. “It's well suited for incremental deployment. You can get full resolution via layering techniques. And the impact on standards is trivial.” The downside? Frame compatible doesn't do full HD for each eye. For that, a new spec would be required. To implement 2D compatible solutions, a new infrastructure would be required for deployment. “It's not an issue with optical media or the internet,” he said. “And it offers full resolution when deployed. But the infrastructure has to be fully deployed to work.”



Disney's Carr described challenges in distributing 3D packaged media. “The first challenge was a format for storing and distributing the material,” he said. “It had to accommodate full resolution

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left eye/right eye. We got that part of the problem solved. Still remaining are things like displays, and that is very concerning that 3D displays are compatible and present a clear proposition for 3D." Carr said he was encouraged by "a lot of serious work being done in the display area," but noted that other areas needed to be

addressed, including "the workflow processes to get a film from theatrical to the home video space that involves editing, color, all the post processes to mastering, encoding and authoring the media." "A lot of professionals are spending a lot of time and money investing in those processes," he said.

ESPN just announced the launch of a 3D channel, which will debut with the World Cup in 3D. Pagano described how ESPN has been doing "science experiments with 3D for 2-and-a-half years, learning which sports work best in 3D and how to produce them." "For the upcoming 3D channel, said Pagano, ESPN is working closely with CableLabs and satellite companies. "We think we have an understanding of the live television part," he said. "We're comfortable going forward at this stage."

Broberg introduced CableLabs as a R&D consortium for the cable industry. "In our lab, we generate 3D content in all these different formats and send it around the plant that represents the architecture of many cable operators," he explained. "Then we see how the signal interfaces with the 3D TV sets. We did compatibility testing with manufacturers. HDMI is a very powerful uncompressed interface but it has so many options that if it's not implemented the exact same way, complications can arise." Broberg revealed that "frame-compatible" is a good solution in the immediate future. "But we will be migrating to new codecs and sets," he says. "As we emigrate to new services, we're looking at multi-view codec. We also need a migration plan; at one point, you'll have both systems in the plant. Those are the challenges we're looking at."

BSkyB is a U.K. satellite TV provider and broadcasters with 9.5 million customers, 1.6 million of whom have HD boxes. "We started our 3D exploration, to see if we can we fit a quality 3D signal through that infrastructure," said Lenz. "This is a new premium proposition if we could do it through our existing HD infrastructure." Starting off with side-by-side frame compatible, BSKyB did some live acquisition of boxing matches and other events. "Five months ago we committed to launching a 3D channel in 2010 to pubs and clubs, a fairly significant business, ahead of launching to residential base," he said. "We've confirmed there will be a common frame-compatible format across the manufacturers. We're still looking at what to do with maximizing encoding."

At Sonic Solutions, said Ely, CinemaNow powers on-demand services for BlockBuster and Best Buy. "We have it kind of easy," he said. "We work directly with device manufacturers, chip manufacturers and ultimately the people who build the boxes in the TV sets. We put our platform on these TV sets and boxes and we can pick our formats and deliver it to the device, transparent to the consumer."

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Which form of media will deliver 3D to the home first? Aylsworth believes optical media will be the first, followed by cable/satellite and then the Internet. "And last will be the terrestrial broadcasters," she said, noting that it is "all based on who has the biggest challenges."

How will the 3D channels be packaged to consumers? A la carte? Packaged? Pricing? ESPN's Pagano said that his network is still talking to customers and has no answers. BSkyB is "more advanced in its planning," said Lenz but hasn't yet announced its package. "There'll be pricing and packaging," he said. "We're going to try to make this profitable. We have the channel and the platform and we're subscription business, so for us it's not as contentious. But there are so many variants of how we can market this."

In answer to a question posed by Aylsworth, Ely did say that the cloud computing used for gaming in 2D may well be on the horizon for 3D gaming. "Certainly," he said. "Gaming on PCs in the active shutter world is already there. They can take a 3D game and render out to the 3D glasses. Ultimately, gaming is the way a lot of consumers will interact with 3D since there aren't too many 3D movies/TV but there are a lot of 3D games."

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